A

Seasonable PRESENT

To the Renowned Society of

GHOST-MONGERS,

And particularly to

My very Learned COUSIN

The CLERGYMAN,

Their SECRETARY.

The SECOND EDITION, Corrected.

O miseri! Quæ tanta insania, Cives!

LUKE xvi. 26.

Between us and you there is a great Gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

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MVSEVM
RITAN
NICVM

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Seaſonable PRESENT

To the Renowned Society of

GHOST-MONGERS, &c.

Reverend Sir,

I Want to ſpeak a word with you before you go on further to turn the Heads of the Vulgar with your Stories of *Ghoſts*, *Spirits*, and *Spectres*.

I cannot but wonder, that a Man of your Profeſſion (devoted to promote Truth, and oppoſe Error) ſhould let himſelf down ſo low, as to become a Retailer of *Old Stories*, and a Promoter of the Belief of them. Does this, Sir, become you, as a Perſon whoſe great Concern is, or ought to be, to promote the *Goſpel* only? Or do you ſtoop, out of mere *Need*, to ſuch low and deſpicable Catch-penny Jobbs as theſe? If ſo, I am ſorry for you, and wiſh you to employ your Time better for the future.

Come, prithee Man, none of theſe grave Airs and forbidding Phizzes. Off with the Maſk, confeſs the Truth, ſhew it to the World in its native Dreſs, and delude the Populace no longer with theſe empty Bubbles, nor frighten them out of their ſeven Senſes with the Report of your Fairies, Hobgobblins, and Spectres; and why not of *Witches* alſo?

What can you mean, Sir, being (as you ſay) a Clergyman, to be ſo little attentive to *Scripture* and right *Reaſon*? Conſider the Subject, and ſee how it will turn upon you.

Can you ſeriouſly take upon you to teach Mankind, that the Spirits, Ghoſts, or *Souls* of the departed, return into this World after their Exit out of it? and that ſo *frequently* as you and others would have us believe they do? Pray, Sir, whither do you think "the Souls "of the *Faithful* go, after they are delivered "from the Burden of the Fleſh?" Does not the *Burial-Office* directly anſwer you, that they go immediately into *Joy and Felicity*?—Give me leave to aſk you next, Whither go the Souls of the *Wicked*? Does not the New Teſtament plainly tell you, into that State *where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth*?

Now conſider, Sir:—Suppoſe the Soul of any Perſon departed (of this Mrs *Night-prank* for Inſtance) to be in a State of *Bliſs*. Do you think, or can you imagine, that a Soul advanced to ſo *happy* a Situation (ſuch as *Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entered*

turned into the Heart of Man to conceive) should entertain the least *Wish* or *Desire*, or should indeed be at *Liberty*, to *return* into this World again? — And to what purpose? Only to play Tricks with the Living? Only to try Skill at Bo-peep with them? to lurk behind Curtains; to delude the Ignorant with Noises, Scratchings, Thumpings, and other silly Artifices of this kind, contrived only to bring Custom and Money into the Pockets of little Knaves and petty Jugglers? — Can you seriously believe, Sir, that the great, the good and wise Majesty of Heaven would permit this, and allow a *Return* from Heaven to Earth to execute such a wretched and wicked Design?

But, by the way, we have no Reason to imagine that the Decoy-duck in *Cock-Lane*, (so addicted to *angry* Scratchings, so intent upon *revengeful* Purposes, so *silly*, though at the same Time cunning, in the Management of her little Cheats, so palpably *mistaken* in many Instances, and so *evasive* and *prevaricating* in others) we have, I say, no room to suppose, that this little Dabbler in Necromancy, is a *celestial Visitant*, deputed hither on a very important Occasion by the KING of Heaven.

Suppose next, that a departed Soul is in a State of *Torment*. Do you think that the D—l (having got his Prey within his Clutches) is such a Fool as to let it go again, and roam and ramble where it pleases? Will that rigid

Jail-keeper allow his Priſoner to come back into this World upon the *Parole of Honour*, and that not only for a Day or two, but for Weeks, or Months, or even for Years, as we have frequently heard of in ſome Caſes? — And pray, for what? In the preſent Caſe, it will, I ſuppoſe, be ſaid, to develop *Murder*. But, good Sir, be pleaſed to recollect, that *the Devil was a* Murderer *from the Beginning*. And would he, (trow you) ſpoil his own Trade? Does not this ſhew you, at once, the *Abſurdity* of this Pretence? And dare you to ſupport it any longer?

You have, I think, no Refuge now left you, but to recur to a *Middle State* (whether Purgatory, or any other) in order to prop up for a while longer, a miſerable, declining, and ſinking Cauſe. Do ſo, and welcome. What are you now the better? The ſame Arguments will have the ſame Force againſt you even here alſo. On the other hand, if you ſuppoſe, with ſeveral learned Men of the preſent Age, that there is *no* ſuch Middle State, then it is evident at firſt Sight, that all Pretences of this kind are totally overturned. For who (upon this Suppoſition) can return from a State of Inſenſibility into a ſtate of Senſibility before the *laſt* Day?

If you conſult the *Scriptures*, you will not, I believe, be much tempted to think that the Deceaſed have any Knowledge of our Affairs here below, or are ever permitted to return from the inviſible World, either to compoſe Diffe-

Differences, or to create Disturbances. The *Popish* Doctrine supposes the departed Saints to be privy to all our Transactions, and acquainted with all our Ways. The Scripture speaks in another Strain, acknowledging GOD only to be Omniscient, and accordingly applying to Him only, and *not* to the Saints, in Prayer. *Doubtless, O Lord, thou art our Father, though Abraham be* IGNORANT *of us, and Israel acknowledge us not* [1]. As much as to say, they know nothing of us. As for those that *dwell in Houses* (or Bodies) *of Clay, they perish for ever, without any regarding it,—they die, even without Wisdom: Call now, if there be any that will answer thee: And to which of the Saints wilt thou turn thee* [2]?

These Declarations plainly intimate, that *there is no Device, no Knowledge, nor Wisdom in the Grave, whither we are going* [3]; and that the Dead know not any thing of our Transactions upon Earth.

As to the *Soul* then (whether good or bad) being at liberty to make Excursions now and then upon a Visit amongst Mortals in this sublunary World, I would advise you, Sir, for the future, not to pretend to know *more* about it than you really *do* (which is just nothing at all;) and that in regard to the invisible State, you would never presume to be *wise above what is written*; but humbly and deliberately content yourself, as I do, with that just Observation of our great Poet,

"——To

[1] Isa. lxiii. 16. [2] Job iv. 20, 21. — v. 1. [3] Eccles. ix.

"——————To the farthest Shore,
"When once we pass, the *Soul* returns no
"more."

But, Sir, if you can say any thing farther, you will probably say, that although the *Soul* itself returns no more, yet *other* Spirits, good or bad, may interest themselves in the Affairs of this lower World.—I see your Aim, and give this Answer: Good *Angels are* indeed *ministring Spirits sent forth from God to minister to those who shall be Heirs of Salvation*[4]. But can you rationally think, that those good Beings, the holy Angels, have at this Time any *extraordinary* Affair of *Salvation* to transact in *Cock-Lane*, of all the Lanes, Alleys, Bye-places, and Streets, of our two great Cities? and that they are therefore *sent forth* by the Supreme Being as his particular Messengers, to carry on that great Work, in that Place, though in a Manner so mean and unbecoming, and in such a ridiculous *Jumble* of Company,

Grus, Cornix, Asinus, Bos, Fur, Sus—atque SACERDOS?

If, therefore, the *good* Angels can have no Concern (as I dare swear they have not) in such paltry Doings, so disparaging to their Character, and so contrary to their true Employ, can you have any *other* Angels or Messengers now to father this idle Tale upon, but those of *Satan?* And suppose you could be well

[4] Heb. i. ult.

well aſſured, that it was the old cloven-footed Deceiver himſelf, that was acting here in Perſon, and dealing out his Oracles amongſt you, would you like to truſt him? Or would your reſpectable Rendezvous of curious Queſtioniſts from ſeveral Parts of the Town be fond of engaging him in Sophiſtry, or in any other Arts of wheedling and deceiving? For my own part, conſidering myſelf as a Man and a *Chriſtian*, I ſhould think it much beneath me to throw away two Minutes upon ſuch wretched Dialogues, well knowing the Arts of Deceivers, and that there is no more of *Satan* (unleſs in his Agents) at the Bottom of the Myſtery of this Iniquity, than there is of the Intervention of an *Angel of Light*. No, look out the Managers *behind the Screens*; they are no *Spirits*; they are as ſurely clothed with *Fleſh and Blood* as you yourſelves are, only guarding moſt cautiouſly againſt the *Light*, becauſe they too well know *their Deeds are evil*, and therefore not capable of bearing a ſtrict Examination.

The utmoſt Care ſhould be taken to prevent and diſcover *Frauds*; and it is a noble Work to do it. Impoſtors diſcovered, ought immediately to be *pilloried*; and the Magiſtrates will not be guiltleſs, if they do not make ſtrict Enquiry into theſe Miſdemeanors, and cauſe the Contrivers of them to be ſeized and puniſhed according to Law; otherwiſe *new* Impoſtures will be continually ſtarting up in other Parts of the Town and Country, and there will

will be no End of such vain and delusive Practices.

To speak my Mind freely, I am sometimes almost tempted to suspect, that those constant Dabblers in puddled Waters, the JESUITS, may be at the Bottom of this Affair, as they were in that of the Boy of *Bilston*, and forty others that I could name; every Thing of this kind tending to facilitate their Game amongst the Ignorant. Our silly People will not discern their Tricks, nor our Men in Power lay them open, as they easily might, and would if they had a truly Patriot Spirit. If due Care was taken about such Matters as soon as they begin to stir, they would all be crushed in the Bud, and come to nothing! and I might venture to foretel, that in a short Time you would hear as little of *Ghosts*, as you do of *Witches*; and that scarce one Story out of an hundred of this kind will, from that Period, bear the Test of *close Examination*.

I wonder how it comes into Peoples Heads, that these are Interpositions of *Providence* for the Discovery of *Murders*. Listen; consider! Do those who invent such Things, seriously bethink themselves *what* they are doing? Is it not high *Presumption*, to make so free with the *Deity*, and charge to his Providence what is a mere Invention of our own? —— Pray, how comes it about, that supernatural Means are appointed for the Discovery of some particular Barbarities of this kind, and not of others equally great or greater; and indeed of

every

every Murder, down from *Abel* to this Time? No doubt of it, Millions have escaped, and are like to continue undiscovered to the *last great Day*. That is the only Day of Trial; then (and not now, by the unseasonable Intrusions of scraping and thumping Ghosts) *God will bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be Evil*[5]. In the mean while, by anticipating the Judgment of God, and boldly wresting the Management of his supreme Prerogative into our own Hands, we run counter to the wise Order and Designation of his Providence and revealed Will; which refers us all ultimately to that *unerring Tribunal*, whose Cognizance no Wickedness, though of ever so long a Date, can possibly escape.

I see you cite *Addison* in your Title Page, in order, I suppose, to enhance the Merit of your Ghosts and Spectres. I wish you had been pleased to refer us to the particular Passage, where you make him say, that "Stories of "*Ghosts* and *Apparitions* deserve to be taken "notice of, as they contain a most certain "Proof of the *Immortality of the Soul*, &c." What! a Proof superior to that which the *Gospel* gives us? The Gospel hath left nothing relating to the present Duty, or future State of Man, undiscovered to us. What Need have we therefore of any farther or better Witnesses, than our Lord Jesus Christ himself, (who came down from Heaven to instruct us

[5] Eccles. xii. last.

in theſe great Truths) and his Meſſengers the Holy Apoſtles, who taught the ſame throughout the World, and confirmed them with incontеſtible Signs following? Notifications therefore from *Ghoſts* and *Spectres*, after this, look a little aukward, and render the Pretences from that Quarter juſtly ſuſpicious. If I had no better Aſſurance of a future Life, than I can have from *Ghoſts*, *Knockings* and *Scratchings*, upon my ſerious Word, I ſhould be rather tempted to diſbelieve, than credit it. GOD hath declared his Will concerning that great Point: His Will is recorded in the New Teſtament: I deſire no farther Aſſurance; and the Goſpel, I am ſure, wants no Support from Fictions.

GOD *never made his Work for* GHOSTS *to mend.*

FINIS.

MVSEVM BRITANNICVM